

### Cubicle Land: on the sociology of internationalized rule

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**KLAUS SCHLICHTE**

**CUBICLE LAND**

**ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF INTERNATIONALIZED RULE**

**InIIS-Arbeitspapier Nr. 38  
2012**

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ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF INTERNATIONALIZED RULE

**InIIS-Arbeitspapier Nr. 38/12**

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## **Abstract**

This essay is an attempt to summarize a few core features of international organizational changes that are observable in several fields, especially in the organization of academic research but also in development policy and probably several others. The main thesis here is that bureaucratic rule has taken on a new guise with a new temporality and new organizational forms. Cubicle Land is a metaphor for the decentralized, pluri-local form of organization that is based on a project logic and requires an entrepreneurial self. It is, as is argued in this essay, not apolitical, but a form of domination, if one takes Max Weber's saying seriously that domination in everyday life is administration.

## 1. Introduction

*"Each office within the skyscraper is a segment of the enormous file, a part of the symbol factory that produces the billion of slips of paper that gear modern society into its daily shape. From the executive's suite to the factory yard, the paper webwork is spun; a thousand rules you never made and don't know about are applied to you by a thousand people you have not met and never will."*

What C. Wright Mills (1951: 189) tried to describe with these lines is not a negative utopia but a picture of the society of employees into which the US had turned during Second World War, at least according to his analysis. Long before digitalization and the "age of information" replaced paper by bites, Mills saw offices as a network, a communicative system of leadership and coordination, organized by big hierarchical institutions.

Meanwhile this system of vast national bureaucracies has changed. Hierarchical centralized bureaucracies tend to be replaced by the plains of "Cubicle Land". With this metaphor I would like to designate a global landscape of work cells separated by movable panels and connected via fibre optic cables, scattered across continents. While the bureaucratic structure of government has remained, it has lost its national segmentary character.

The morphology of bureaucratic rule is changing. Skyscrapers are no longer regarded by all as the icon of high modernity, but the office is still the stem cell of power. The organizational structure of offices has changed, too, since Mills wrote his analysis. However, the great utopia of the modern ages, namely to govern society by the invention of coordinated and well-organized offices in which information, competence, speed and force concur, is still alive. "Governance" – "global" and "good" – is the most recent reflection of this tendency in the language of political science. And while in modern times government was organized mostly in hierarchical organizations, it has meanwhile, as I shall argue, turned into a slightly different mode. It differs from earlier fantasies of government in its temporality and in its main modus operandi. "Cubicle Land", the endless landscape of interconnected cubicle-like work cells scattered throughout the globe, is the backbone of internationalized rule in world society. It is this form of project-oriented bureaucratic rule that I want to outline in this article.

While sociologists noticed early on how important bureaucracies are, political science has been much slower in doing so. Max Weber noted that domination (*Herrschaft*) in everyday life simply means administration (*Verwaltung*). Ruling the world, done by states in the classic form of governments or in its more fashionable "governance" version is therefore, as I shall argue here, a question of administration. Whoever wishes to know what the political features of the world are, should look for the forms in which it is administered. Following political sociologists like Weber and others, I would like to challenge currently dominating understandings of international relations, which conceive world politics either in terms of competition between hierarchical political units called states or in the framework of the lofty concept of "governance".

In the academic field of International Relations, the issue of bureaucratic organization has only been dealt with occasionally. The role of bureaucracies in foreign policy was already

debated forty years ago (Allison 1971; Krasner 1972) without having had a large impact on current debates. In the last five years or so, the bureaucratic character of international organizations has been studied again (Barnett/Finnemore 2004), stimulating at least more general investigations of the forms of organizations in international politics (Dingwerth et al. 2009). However, these recent analyses only focus on international organizations, whereas in fact bureaucratic features are dominant in many more areas of politics. Therefore, the theses of this paper go much further:

1. The mode of bureaucratic rule is still the central feature of rule in contemporary world society. "Cubicle Land", the most recent decentralized but interconnected mode of bureaucratic rule, cuts across national boundaries and permeates state organizations.
2. This mode of rule has a history that is identical with the history of administration and management. States and corporations have both enforced bureaucratic modes of rule, even if they often presented their projects under very different headings. This mode has meanwhile become the basis of non-state organizations like NGOs as well.
3. Cubicle Land, at first sight an apolitical form of organization, is in fact a highly political phenomenon. It brims with the dynamics of power and attempts to turn power into domination. In the top echelon, priests and experts have monopolized wisdom on "salvation goods" (*Heilsgüter*). They preach and represent the dogma of the day, strong statehood in some decades, the liberal market idea for the subsequent decades, and so on. The interconnections they spin themselves are not organized, but constitute an international caste of intellectuals, experts and consultants. They rule by discourse, by the creation of symbolic capital that sometimes includes state institutions, and sometimes plays with the alleged opposite of the state, the market. The experts create a language of "overall objectives" and "verifiable indicators" that low-ranking officers have to push through with the office staff in bureaucratic organizations. Subordinated to this "elite" is a bulk of officers, leading cadres, or executive managers (*leitende Angestellte*). This stratum organizes the armies of office workers, placed in cubicles in which they execute the orders of the day.
4. Cubicle Land is a form of rule and domination that emerges in various fields. It is most visible in development politics and in various policy fields in which the European Union is expanding its rule within member states. One primary example of it is science policy.
5. The newness of "Cubicle Land" consists in its temporality. Cubicle Land differs from older, more centralized and more hierarchical forms of bureaucratic rule in that it functions according to a project logic. Projects are short-term policies stipulating attainable goals ("project purposes") that must be achieved in periods of between three months and three years. Older forms of government, Soviet and Western style alike, were projects, too, and also driven by utopian ideas. Cubicle Land differs from that logic by the parcelling out of single steps in order to increase the control of political processes, especially the implementation of utopian ideas which follow "expectational concepts" (*Erwartungsbegriffen*) such as "peace", "democracy", "freedom" or "justice" that are characterized by their unattainability. This form of bureaucratic domination also produces a new form of employees, new subjects as a result of a new "assujettissement".

As political scientists, we usually imagine rule and domination in a different way to what is suggested here. Government is thought of in terms of the rule of institutions as they are described in political science textbooks entitled, for example, "Introduction to the political system



of [Country X]". Public and private administrations, offices and their practices only very rarely appear in such books. Alternatively, government is conceived of as being the government of persons or groups of persons or of "institutions". What I address in this paper is the "rule of nobody", as Hannah Arendt (1990: 59) famously phrased the logic of modern bureaucratic domination, in its most recent epitomization.

Cubicle Land is another example for the malleability of bureaucratic rule. It produces in its historical forms its own orders and hierarchies. Cubicle Land is the latest stage of a global culture of office employees who are suitable for jobs in international organizations, EU departments, academia or non-governmental organizations or government positions. What they do in their professional lives – writing applications, researching data, compiling reports, constructing accounts and stories, presenting "facts" and mediating between viewpoints – is totally identical. Only the contents of such practices vary. Practices like producing texts and graphs and presenting bits of communication in writing and orally are required in all subsystems called "policies".

Such a thesis, that the world is ruled by an international bureaucracy parcelled into sub-units of states and other organizations, stands of course in contradiction to established ways of conceiving world politics. Most theories of world politics conceive states as the main actors and see them in a conflictive relation rather than as parts of a system.

The empirical foundation of my argument is scattered and not yet systematized.<sup>1</sup> In the next section I will delve into two policy fields, namely development policy and science policy. The purpose of these empirical excursions is rather to elucidate my argument. Solid proof, strong enough to defeat alternative theoretical viewpoints, can only be delivered later, after having carried out some systematic research. The purpose of my paper is therefore rather to provoke comments that will help me to design such research.

I cannot deal with all theoretical strands here, but instead, in the final section, I will address the most fundamental theoretical issues related to my argument. For reasons of delineations a few remarks on the current theoretical landscapes might be in order. In addition to so-called post-positivist understandings, three interpretations of world politics can currently be distinguished. These are: multipolarity, empire and global governance. It is probably not mistaken to assume that these three paradigms dominate the field of International Relations. Common to all three is the assumption that the crucial importance of states is a given.

The most widespread assumption, as found in the mass media and a lot of scholarly work as well, sees the world as a world of competing states. Governments in capitals make decisions in order to pursue their goals in a zero-sum game. All states are hierarchically organized, with their respective heads of states at the top echelon. And all states pursue relative gains, so that states' actions can be best accounted for by rationalist models. Cooperation between states is difficult these days as no single state can act as hegemon in our multipolar world.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence, however, is not hard to find. Apart from the cited literature it stems from my own observations in Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Uganda, France and Germany over the last ten years while teaching or conducting research there. Additional information comes from conversations with employees of NGOs in Haiti, Sudan, Germany and in my own professional field, "political science" as an institutionalized academic activity.

Another notion of world politics follows the concept of empire. There is evidence to support this viewpoint, too: US military expenditure, for example, is as high as that of the next 15 most spending countries combined, more than half a million US soldiers are based overseas, and even if this does not yet constitute an empire, a number of serious scholars use this concept to describe US foreign policy (Laurens 2009, Münkler 2005).

In contrast to these two approaches, representatives of a "global governance" paradigm identify a new pattern in world politics. They claim that politics between states is not always a zero-sum game. Synergies between states, international organizations, private firms and NGOs are possible and need to be realized in order to overcome "global problems". "Public-private partnerships" are promoted as one of the most promising ideas for coming to terms with these issues by producing "collective goods" (cf. Risse/Lehmkuhl 2007).

I now want to sketch a fourth interpretation that draws instead on seminal authors of political sociology. Max Weber, Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu are, as I argue, helpful in conceptualizing a political world that I call Cubicle Land.

Bureaucratic domination, the most pertinent feature of politics in world society, is rather overlooked by classical approaches of IR. They focus far too much on the horizontal structure of states in their depiction of world politics, thereby overlooking the essence of what these institutions do, namely: practice bureaucracy. State and non-state bureaucracies already formed a global system of bureaucracies a long time ago. This global bureaucratic domination has a history, and Cubicle Land is only the most recent stage of development in the bureaucratization of the world. This history is a global one that is not linear but marked by disruptions, hybrids, pushes and halts.

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<sup>2</sup> A paradigmatic case of such "power politics" is the "great game" of Russia, China, the US and the EU in Central Asia. On the inappropriateness of such conceptions for inter-state relations in the region cf. Heathershaw 2007. Similar ideas stimulate the discussion about China's role in Africa and the allegedly waning role of EU member states there (cf. French 2004).

## 2. The global history of bureaucracy

It is a common wisdom among sociologists that any form of domination needs a group of people to govern, and that this group always has some form of organization. However, this form does not need to be bureaucratic, and not all bureaucracies take on the same guise as the one that emerged in early modern Europe. It is this form, though, that has been globalized, first by the process of European expansion (cf. Reinhard 1999), and later by the endless interweaving of international organizations. In this section I will first outline how this form developed historically, and then try to briefly describe its globalization.

### 2.1 The emergence of modern bureaucracy

It was the Physiocrat Vincent de Gournay (1712-1759) who coined the expression 'bureaucracy', ironically by criticizing it. He observed that functionaries in absolutist France showed the tendency to accumulate more and more power in their hands and this rendered him sceptical about governments' real chances of implementing decisions. This criticism of bureaucratic rule never died out and it still inspires the mostly denunciatory use of the term. Sociologically it was defined much later. The term designates a type defined by Max Weber. Based on codified law, an "unpersonal order", educated officials work in organizations that are structured hierarchically and according to competences. Within these organizations, records and written documents are generated and compiled, and functionaries may not dispose of means individually but are bound to rules in their decisions (may not make decisions independently but are bound to rules and procedures?). The office becomes the "kernel of any modern associational life" (Weber 1985: 126), and state officials (*Beamte*) who have their counterparts in private businesses/in the private sector, too, are remunerated financially, they have no other sources of income, and are subordinated to a strict system of discipline and control. On the other hand, they are offered a career path (*Laufbahn*). Precision, consistency, discipline, and reliability – it is the calculability of bureaucratic apparatuses that render them so precious and efficient in the eye of power-holders, even in early modern times. It evolved, however, simultaneously with capitalism, as capitalism and bureaucracy constitute each other. Not only states and churches were bureaucratically organized, but also "armies, political parties, private firms, professional associations, clubs, foundations and whatever else" (Weber 1985: 128).<sup>3</sup> Bureaucracy therefore is not just an organizational issue; it is an intrinsically political phenomenon since any administration is government. Furthermore, modern political systems, too, are shaped by bureaucratic logics. Bureaucracy, as Weber put it, is the "inescapable shadow of mass democracies" (Weber 1985: 130).

All explanations of the rise of bureaucracies draw on long structural processes. While they officially exist in order to solve particular problems, to allow governments to "steer" societies, they emerged as tools of domination, as machines of monarchs in order to extract resources

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<sup>3</sup> In this sense, modern bureaucracies are different from patrimonial forms. In India and China, of course, we find forms of bureaucracies much earlier than in Europe. They linger, however, like forms of feudalism, between centralization and local patrimonialization: incumbents of positions appropriate the chances they have been granted, and these practices impede genuine rationalization. It seems as if the unfolding of modern bureaucracies is interconnected with the historical development of modern capitalism.

out of societies. Such resources were needed to fund warfare and prestige cults of royal courts (cf. Jacoby 1969). From its very beginning, the history of bureaucracies is therefore closely related to inter-state relations. Very soon, states began to mimic each others' bureaucracies. The parallel emergence of the monopoly of violence and the monopoly of taxation that Otto Hintze, Norbert Elias and Charles Tilly have reconstructed so carefully also required the rationalization of state organization (Raphael 2000: 21), ending up in related bureaucratic patterns.

Some authors therefore explain bureaucratization with functionalist theorems: differentiation, prolonged chains of interrelated actions and the need for coordination led to rationalization, and this ultimately meant the calculation of means and organization in a bureaucratic manner that would order actions and orders (procedures and commands?) cognitively, structure them logically and systematize them (Breuer 1994: 41). We know that this ideal was not yet achieved in early modern European states, but during the 19th century the growth and rationalization of bureaucracies became a trans-European trend (cf. Osterhammel 2009: 866 ff.).

When monopolies of violence were "published" (made public?) by bourgeois revolutions, as Norbert Elias put it, state bureaucracies were opened up as professional fields for the emerging middle classes as well. The German types of functionaries (*Berufsbeamte*) were an integrative measure in constitutional monarchies to include further groups into the apparatus of rule in order to stabilize it (Wunder 1986: 67; Dreyfus 2000). From then onwards the state became a popular career choice as new groups learned quickly that state offices were a means to social mobility.

Apart from such micro-mechanisms that fostered the validity and acceptance of bureaucracies, one could look at the enormous growth of them also in terms of global functional requirements: According to Niklas Luhmann, for example, organization is a function of social differentiation (2010: 59), and the fact that the political organization of world society is segmented into increasingly bureaucratic states only conceals a parallel process to the rise of "national economies", which in fact constituted a world market. There might be a global bureaucratic system, too.

The emergence of the largest modern bureaucracies took place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when banks and insurance companies were only able to administer the vast amounts of information by numeric codifications. This was the birth of "data systems" (Mills 1951: 193), and this again shows that the history of bureaucracies is not merely a state affair. All large businesses, not only trusts, show similar organizational features, and their typical personnel, the employee, is just an equivalent to the state official (Krakauer 1930). The development of the Western welfare state, therefore, is nothing more than a convergence of bureaucratic modes of administering lives.

## 2.2 The globalization of bureaucracies

Like the history of parliaments and constitutions, the history of bureaucracies is one of imports and exports, appropriations and reformulations. Such migrations of organizational forms first took place in Europe. Colonialism and its projects then became one big vector for the global spread of this form of political organization. From the era of colonialism, as many case studies show, one can draw a direct line to the practices of project logic that I call Cubicle Land. On the other hand, there are also deliberate importations of European bureaucracy into other parts of the world like China and Japan (cf. Reinhard 1999: 491-509).<sup>4</sup> In all instances, of course, the migrating concept also incorporated local traditions and forms once it was implemented.

One of the most prominent examples for the bureaucratization of rule was of course the Soviet Union, if not Tzarist Russia. Very early, non-dogmatic communism denounced "real existing socialism" as merely bureaucracy that only privileges a stratum of functionaries and officials (cf. Rizzi 1985). The critique of this "nomenclatura" then became a constant theme among dissident voices in Eastern Europe and wherever else socialism was practiced (cf. Djilas 1957). Although during the Cold War this criticism was of course easily used and perhaps at times exaggerated by Western opponents as proof of its own righteousness, there can be little doubt that social and political realities in the entire former Soviet empire were shaped by extremely bureaucratic practices.

ISAF in Afghanistan and MONUC in the DR Congo are not the first to learn that modern bureaucracies are contingent on the prevailing social preconditions. Colonial administrators, too, had to compromise with local authorities and live with suboptimal outcomes of their endeavours (cf. Spittler 1981; von Trotha 1994). The major consequence of colonial bureaucratization, however, was the implementation of an ideal that survived in Dar es Salaam as well as in Delhi, Djakarta or Tashkent (cf. Eckert 2007; Bichsel 2009).

Stories, forms and shapes differed of course, constituting diverse trajectories. In Central Asia a late kind of adaptation of Soviet-type bureaucratic rule was developed (Geiss 2007), while in South Asia, in sub-Saharan Africa, and, again much earlier, in Latin America, colonial rule led to a veritable surge of bureaucratization from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Like the Ottoman Empire, China and Japan deliberately introduced administrative reforms along the lines of the European model. The Ottoman Empire, though, turned into a precursor of today's internationally administered spaces when its debt crisis induced informal take-overs by European powers.

Once again, financial administration seemed to indicate a tendency that would later be observed elsewhere, too. Maybe its need to "rule by calculation" (*Beherrschen durch Berechnen*, Weber 1919: 594) gives it the function of a vector of bureaucratization.

The history of the British Empire is, hence, a history of the globalization of bureaucracy, too. As Niall Ferguson (2003) has shown, bureaucratic forms like currency and loan systems, the

<sup>4</sup> Ironically, re-importations took place as well. In the late 1960s, impressed and alarmed by Japanese success on different world markets, Western management theory studied practices and models there in order to draw lessons that would keep Western corporate government "competitive" (cf. Boltanski/Chiapello 2003).

Common Law and the ideal of an efficient Civil Service were exported and locally entrenched by imperial expansion. It would probably not be a major challenge to show how other colonial empires developed different, but similar forms of rule by bureaucratic means.

It was most likely during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the foundations of today's political structures were laid, including the main bureaucracies in Europe (cf. Osterhammel 2009; Bayart 2004). The expansion of the world market and the structural features of world politics emerged simultaneously (cf. Schlichte 2011) both bringing about a spread of bureaucratic features of rule. In retrospect, the continuation of that global formation into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the present day might (one day?) be regarded as the age of the internationalization of rule due to global bureaucracies developing their own momentum.

The globalization of bureaucracies has, of course, not only been the work of states and corporations. Studies in standardizations have shown that especially associations are major contributors to the fabric of global norms and compatibility, and these homogenizations meanwhile apply to anything from handball to the registration of endangered bird species (Brunsson/Jacobsson 2000: 3). Human rights as well as environment issues typify the kind of political fields in which associations do politics by bureaucratic means nowadays. Any new regulation inspires a new bureaucratic tool for monitoring and administering. This, it seems, applies particularly in those cases where regulations cross state borders, as in the case of issue areas defined as "global problems", which are addressed by means of immense programmes like "state-building" or the creation of the "European Research Area" (cf. Bruno 2008).

### **3. Cubicle Land – the latest stage of bureaucratic rule**

The classic understanding of bureaucracies is shaped by the image of vast hierarchical organizations. The emergence of such organizations was the life-world experience of Max Weber and other founding authors of sociology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century like Robert Michels (1911), who worked on the growing importance of political consequences of bureaucratization. Many later scholars and also the emergent literature of management studies and organizational theory have pointed out that this concept was inspired by the ideal-typical understanding of armies. Strictly separated strict rank hierarchies, direct command-obedience relations and clearly defined competences are the core characteristics of such an organizational concept.

For a long time this ideal of bureaucratic organization prevailed. It first came under criticism from the literature on management theory and subsequently, since the late 1980s, in policies of Western states. Under the guise of "new public management", a discursive shift took place that – in the rhetoric and self-understanding of its proponents – is anti-bureaucratic. In practice, however, such policies simply reproduce and enlarge the bureaucratic character of politics. What has changed, however, as I will argue, is the mode of bureaucratic organization.

The project logic of Cubicle Land has been developing in certain areas (issue areas?) of international relations as well. A great deal of these changes is attributable to the rise of NGOs. While assumptions about the number of NGOs around the globe go into millions (McGann/Johnstone 2006), the triplication of the number of NGOs registered as having a consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council<sup>5</sup> between 1985 and 2005 indicates that there has been a clear trend towards a professionalization – and that means bureaucratization – of these organizations. Their rise is certainly also due to a new trend in the practice of Western governments of delegating the implementation of development and other tasks to such organizations, as having less people on the payroll keeps state bureaucracies slim and flexible.

It would be naïve to assume that this change might indicate a decrease in bureaucratic practices. In fact, the opposite is more likely to be the case, as the amount of time spent on the highly competitive application market has rather grown. Writing applications, documenting implementation, organizing evaluations and writing reports has become the major activity of NGO management staff.

As a consequence, the field of development assistance is meanwhile dominated by the logic of projects, short-term thinking and an overburdened discourse. The European Union has become one massive machine in the production of projects, one of which being the EU itself. Numerous authors have remarked on the advance of "private" actors even in classic fields of international relations such as diplomacy (Kappeler 2003: 57). It is therefore hard to tell how many people on the globe are caught up in the logic I am describing here.

Cubicle Land is an appropriate metaphor for sketching this logic, as it designates the vast landscapes of cells, often extending across whole storeys, in which most white collar employees throughout the world meanwhile work. These cells are not discrete rooms, but are separated off by movable partition panels, each cell covering 2,3 square meters. Standardized as cubicles by companies that offer this furniture, these cells are of course interconnected by phone and digital communication networks. As a consequence, it has become much harder to tell where one organization ends and where the next one begins. Cubicle Land has become, in fact, one country.

In order to delineate this outline of changes in how the world is governed, I will elucidate this impression in three steps: a short sketch of the techniques and practices in Cubicle Land will be followed by a number of theses on its internal political structures. A rather theoretical part of the analysis will deal with the temporality of this form of organization and the endlessness of projects.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. ([http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/pdf/INF\\_List.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/pdf/INF_List.pdf)) accessed July 27, 2010.

### *Techniques and practices*

Bureaucratic domination has always had a material and a personal aspect. Its history could be told both as a story of commodification of the labour of rule and of increasingly abstract systems of knowledge production and administration. In its inner life, however, bureaucracy has always maintained a deeply personal aspect. Fictional portraits of bureaucratic characters in literature, for example, share two common recurrent features. From Herman Melville to Nicolai Gogol, Italo Svevo and Wilhelm Genazino, they all discuss the monotony of paper work and the cruelty of superiors and colleagues in Boston, Moscow, Trieste and Frankfurt. These novels are also instructive when it comes to what bureaucrats actually do. In 19<sup>th</sup>-century offices, book-keeping was the central activity. Bureaucracies compiled information on people, businesses, property and so on. This information, as Gerhard Spittler (1980) has shown, formed the backbone of state authority as it made it possible to track down individuals and created the illusion of having an all-encompassing overview of social life.

In the decades after 1900, automatization set in. Punch cards, franking machines, mail sorting machines and later electronic data processing and storage completely transformed the organization of bureaucracies (Gardey 2008). However, they continued to depend on people with a knowledge of the social relations within organizations, routine methods and contexts. While the use and storage of information became depersonalized, the actual fabric of bureaucratic organization has maintained a personal aspect, even though no single person within it has a universal knowledge of its functioning or of the information administered. Instead, selling ideas and visions, presented in PowerPoint, has become more and more prominent, and continues to grow in importance as one reform chases the next.

Two major features of bureaucratic rule have remained, however. Firstly, the gap between bureaucratically produced images and social reality has not been closed. In fact, it has possibly even grown. Secondly, human beings have not disappeared, either, so that very personal aspects of power and domination have continued to exist, juxtaposed and intertwined with technical systems that build power structures by themselves.

What political science textbooks euphemistically call "policy cycles" has become the most recent mode of bureaucratic rule. The design of policies, their implementation, supervision, evaluation and re-design, determines by and large what bureaucracies do. Policy papers, concept papers, monitoring and reporting have become the main activities at all levels, from the higher EU echelons to every NGO bush office in the field of developmental aid (cf. Schlichte/Veit 2007). This practice ranges from the monthly report sheets of individual development projects to the annual "World Development Report" of the World Bank Group which each year coins another key phrase that promises salvation.

The compilation of data and its interpretation for the purpose of "improving policies" and designing new projects is still a crucial activity in Cubicle Land. Frequently, the purpose of data is not so much administration but increasingly just a feature in the process of reformulating policies. It is no coincidence that social sciences are often involved in this process, standing as they do in the long tradition of the relation between states and statistics. In any case, the production of self-referential texts, be they internal briefings, reports, policy recommendations or published annual reports, is the principle activity in Cubicle Land.



### *Internal political structures*

Generally speaking, the history of management is a continuous refinement of instruments for controlling the labor force (Boltanski/Chiapello 2003: 120). Cubicle Land is simply the latest stage in this process. Project employees who – in consistency with the new mode – are expected to regulate themselves, are the most recent outcome.

Bureaucracies, both state and non-state, are now conceived to be leaner and flatter. They do without a number of former layers of hierarchy and they outsource all functions that are not part of the core business. This applies to Ministries of Development as well as to universities. As a consequence, there has been an inconceivable increase in employees who no longer have permanent employment contracts with state agencies but are hired for short-term projects. This places even higher demands on individual employees to achieve well. They have to develop networks of contacts in order to survive in a more flexible, highly volatile professional environment. These networks replace the old career advancement patterns in hierarchical, unilocal bureaucracies.

However, power differences have not vanished. These self-organizing units need leadership, too (Boltanski/Chiapello 2003: 115). All related issues such as power, legitimacy and domination have remained, even if the way they actually function is veiled by a smoke-screen of independence, freedom and choice. Leadership is achieved less through bossism and more through internalized forms of self-organization by the cubicle inmates.

Leaders in Cubicle Land have become team leaders. Instead of sober commands and bureaucratic rules, they need to use "visions" to stimulate a workforce that cannot be motivated by money alone. This "vision" is a way of organizing followership without commanding force. It is rather a form of staged charisma. Leaders become more like coaches of sport teams and resemble less and less the old type of bosses. Motivation and mobilization become their main tasks.

These changes also can be seen in nomenclatures. Former bosses turn into "managers", and dusty administration turns into "management" or "governance". Managers are no longer commanding officers, but must be inspiring thinkers, giving impulses, motivating and being themselves motivated, being generalist and creative (Boltanski/Chiapello 2003: 119). Employees are required to be creative too, as organizations no longer need simple 'jobsworths' who only act under orders, but want to hire the entire personality who has to adapt him- or herself to the expected format to that end. "Management by objective", the innovation of management theory in the 1960s, has thus paved the way for a new mode of internal politics within organizations.

### *The temporality of Cubicle Land – the endlessness of project logic*

Cubicle Land is ruled by concepts that historian Reinhart Koselleck (2006: 68) has called "expectational conceptions" (*Erwartungsbegriffe*). "Good governance" in politics, "excellence" in science, or "development" in economies are not accidentally keywords of our age. These concepts have moving horizons, and the fact that there is no stable definition for them is not a disadvantage, but it does explain their discursive ubiquity. Such concepts now serve as

replacements for the old political utopia that revolved around emancipation, peace, democracy and justice.

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century the meaning of such concepts have of course been contested, as have the means to achieve these shifting horizons. The prevalence of expectational concepts might be explained by the fact that individual particular interests and institutional programmes coalesce here. The quest for "good governance" or "development" and the latest emphasis on "excellency" in academics or "sustainability" in development can, however, not be reduced to such interest coalitions. Their success lies in their quasi-religious character. These are secularized theological conceptions, as Reinhart Koselleck has shown for earlier versions like "progress" (*Fortschritt*) and "liberty" (*Freiheit*).

The current concepts of the temporality project in Cubicle Land stand for endless projections which are characterized by shifting horizons. Once a step has been accomplished, the horizon again moves, which is of course instrumental for all those benefiting from the business. "Mission creep" in international organizations and NGOs should thus not just be understood as the result of institutional self-interest. It is also, and perhaps even more importantly, a built-in mechanism based on visions and expectations.

The consequence of this temporality is an endless string of projects called "reform". This has its historical roots in the governmentality of the Early Modern State as analyzed by Michel Foucault (2004). To turn a society into an object of state intervention, to mould it according to the political imaginations of leaders is the very idea of "government" (*Regierung*). Reform is nowadays seemingly endless, and no longer a process with a marked beginning and a recognizable end point. Reform has become a condition (*Zustand*) in itself. The precise purpose of reforms is the pursuit of aims that can never be achieved. The legitimacy of reform, and the endless projects arising out of it, is based on the non-fulfillment of its aims.

Now, Cubicle Land is a further stage in the history of bureaucratic reform. Contrary to earlier times, when not only decisions were taken centrally but also detailed plans were developed in departmentalized state offices, Cubicle Land is a system in which the inhabitants of cubicles have to invent their futures themselves, of course within the frame of targets set elsewhere. Individual project workers, but particularly their superiors, have to draft future projects; they even have to turn their biographies into projects that show neither times of idleness nor stagnation. The subjects of Cubicle Land have to invent projects, forge plans, build networks and maintain their contacts (Boltanski/Chiapello 2003: 156). All this is part of their value on the labor market in Cubicle Land.

In these markets of ideas and personnel the most important thing is, among other things, to raise an awareness of one's own activities and to create appeal (Boltanski/Chiapello 2003: 160). This becomes more important than the actual content. The importance of "impact factors" in the academic sector of Cubicle Land is one of the most visible proofs of this rule. Because content actually becomes less and less important, subjects also become interchangeable as long as they master the rules of this game of attracting attention. In the respective biographies one will find patterns of nomadism (Deleuze/Guattari 1992: 522) as a consequence of these rules. The successful inhabitant of Cubicle Land has to obey an imperative of "unboundedness".

#### 4. Conclusion: Political Science – a bureaucratic practice

Cubicle Land can be discussed in various regards. One would concern the causality of the observations: Why is there a change in bureaucratic modes? One answer to that question might hint at growing interdependencies that render hierarchical forms of leadership (*Steuerung*) inefficient and inappropriate (Scharpf 2000: 290). Another thesis could be developed along the argument of "gaining its own momentum" (*Eigendynamik*) (Mayntz/Nedelmann 1987). A third one, more in line with critical political economy, would perhaps stress the commercialization of public functions.

Bureaucratic forms of rule appear in our liberal age as something annoying but not utterly dangerous. One point of discussion and criticism has always been its tense relation to democratic ideals. Political theory has always taken this seriously, and there is a long list of authors ranging from Alexis de Tocqueville, Robert Michels and Max Weber to Hannah Arendt, who saw the rise of state bureaucracies as an existential threat to what, in her understanding, politics is actually all about. "Domination by nobody", as she called it (Arendt 1990: 59), can surely be regarded as a threat to democratic principles like transparency and accountability.

I would like to conclude this paper on another note, though. One could regard Cubicle Land as just another form of bureaucracy. My impression, which still needs empirical testing, is that its dangers go beyond that, especially for the social sciences. Political science, especially the productions of "experts" and "analysts", are part of this form of rule. At least in development and security policy they produce reduced images of complex realities in remote areas, selling them under labels that are congruent with general notions that bureaucratic headquarters – be they governmental or not – have of "developing" areas. The entire discourse on "organized crime", "international terrorism" and "failed states" is a product of this kind of anticipatory obedience to assumed expectations (cf. Heathershaw 2007).

In this sense one might say that a vast part of political science and, of course, of International Relations comprises simply participating in a bureaucratic language game. Bureaucracies need this kind of language to categorize a social reality they could otherwise not administer. With the growth of international organizations, state and non-state ones alike, it has become apparent that the globalization of discourse made these categories even broader. The more the organizations tend to cover, the emptier their categories become.

This language, however, has real consequences. When it is reproduced in media and academia, it shapes a perception of a world that is not only much more complex but perhaps totally different from what bureaucratic politics define for their organizational reasons. "Failed states" in Africa, "organized crime" as the main feature of the successor states of the Soviet Union, and the "dangers of Islamism" become generalized perceptions that shape politics. This is much more than the "constitutive power" Barnett and Finnemore found in the activity of international organizations (2004: 17). In fact, it creates a world image that legitimizes increasingly intrusive interventions.

The function of political science is, in my view, to keep a critical distance from the bureaucratically produced notions of the world. Otherwise it risks becoming part of the "doxa" that Bourdieu had in mind when he said that "we are thought by a state which we believe to think" (1998: 93). Without a critical distance that allows for an empirically based understanding of a still under-researched world, political science and IR just remain a part of Cubicle Land.

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